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# **The family farm reconsidered: the transfer of farms in Dutch farmer and peasant rural societies, 1700-1900**

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*Work in progress*

## **Introduction**

In the early-modern period, because of the large differences within the country very different agricultural systems were existing next to each other in the Netherlands. In general, not taking into account proto-industrial regions, two ideal types of rural societies can be discerned, differing in many respects (Karel e.a. 2011).

In the coastal area commercial market-oriented agriculture characterized by large farms, went together with proletarianization. In the countryside of the Dutch provinces Holland, Zeeland, Friesland and Groningen working activities were specialised to a considerable extent, made possible by a strong market-orientation, a money economy and a well-developed institutional system. This was accompanied by high and partly even extremely high urbanisation-rates. Even in the countryside, non-food production was relatively important, suggesting a favourable standard-of-living. From the 16<sup>th</sup> until the start of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Dutch coastal region was possibly the wealthiest part of the world in terms of real income per capita. Nevertheless, the agricultural production of food by relatively large farmers remained one of the backbones of the economy. The importance of livestock and arable farming made the secure control of land (nearly all of which already was cultivated) not only a critical factor in macro-economic development, but also of prime importance for individual social-economic positions and chances.

In the more inland parts of the Netherlands (with the exception of the proto-industrial regions), usually a majority of the rural families had a small farm of their own, the relatively few agricultural labourers still had small agricultural holdings, non-agricultural activities were less developed, and large-scale land reclamation was still possible. Around 1800 surplus agriculture was more or less the rule in large parts of the Dutch provinces of Drenthe, Overijssel, Guelderland and Northern Brabant. Most of the agricultural production remained on the farmstead, and only a limited amount was sold, mainly to pay rents and taxes. Because of the restricted market-dependence so-called peasants<sup>1</sup> were presumably less vulnerable for economic swings and the consequences of personal mistakes due to limited farming capabilities. Money was present in this society, but it was rather scarce. Nevertheless, the

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term farmers for those working the land for their own account, with the purpose to sell most of the produce on the market. We use the term peasants for those (mainly) working the land for their own account, with the purpose to sell only a limited part (less than half?) of the produce on the market, or else use it for payments in kind.

urbanisation-rate in the inland provinces was still considerable compared to other western-European countries, though it was significantly lower than in the Dutch coastal provinces.

In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century both kind of societies (coastal/farmer and inland/peasant) underwent large changes, making them seemingly more the same. However even at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the differences between these two agricultural-societal models were at first glance still enormous.

For instance Hajnal (1965) and Hofstee (1954) suggested a quite close link between marriage date and succession (compare Fertig 2003). This link implicitly suggests that family succession is indeed an attractive strategy to pursue for both parents and children. It solves the problem of the acquisition of a niche for at least one child, while it provides security to parents for their old-age, gives them a feeling of long-term control over their own possessions and sometimes makes it possible for them to favour one of the children. Also family succession becomes attractive due to a strong emotional attachment to a specific land and house and an existing need for family continuity (De Haan 1994).

The linking of marriage date and succession, however, also incurs certain (social) costs. Especially it is quite problematic demographically, while parents have to retire on a relatively young age, or average age at marriage must be far above 30, or else most young couples start their married life living together with one or two of the parents for a long period. This last situation with extended households can be avoided only by settling somewhere else, or in other words by acquiring a niche elsewhere (Fertig 2005). Early retirement means a loss of income, while high average ages at marriage and living in extended households can result in a loss of freedom for young adults. Taking this into account, the actual importance of family succession in a society is for a great deal dependent on what the individual and family needs (preferences or goals) are and the extent to which the social-economic circumstances make it possible to fulfil these needs. What individual or family priorities actually live in a society are of course largely shaped by the institutions (including the social environment).

In this paper we want to investigate how both farmer families and peasant families in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Netherlands dealt with the problem of family succession over the generations. Previous research already showed that in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century the selling of farms in coastal Groningen was as important as family succession by the next generation (Paping 2009; Paping 2011). By the sale of their farms at an appropriate moment a large part of the problem of the tuning in time between the generations could be solved by Groningen farmers. At the meantime, sons were (only) slightly preferred above daughters as successors. Besides, because of frequent remarriages the control of farms was often handed over to new partners instead of descendants. Social mobility tended to be very high. It has been suggested that this seemingly flexible system of farm transfers must have been closely related to the commercial attitude of the - mostly quite rich – farmers, who comprise only less than one third of the total local population) (Paping 2009a). However, if that last relation is indeed true, it should be expected that a rather different transfer system must have existed in for example the villages of the sandy parts of Drenthe (the other case study in this paper), usually characterized as one of the least market-oriented parts of the Netherlands. Here the peasants formed the vast majority of the local population.

Main question of this paper is if the large differences in economic structure between the coastal region (farmers) and inland region (peasants) in the Netherlands were indeed accompanied by very different transfer and inheritance practices.

- Were commercial farmer families indeed less attached to the family farm, and more inclined to sell it than the peasant families in the less commercial regions?
- Were there differences between small and large peasants and farmers?
- What legal and other practises were used in transferring farmsteads and other belongings to the next generation?

- Were there differences between the chances of sons and daughters to succeed on the family farm? How much was the succession of sons preferred?
- Was it acceptable and usual for widows to stay in control of the farm?
- Played high age at marriage and extended and stem families a different role in the transfer of farms to the next generations? Did young couples live on parental farms, waiting to take over? Did retired parents stay at their transferred farm?
- Are there important changes from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, due for instance to the accelerating population growth (resulting in a larger number of surviving children), both in the coastal and inland countryside, from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards?

Using databases on the history of farmsteads and the families living upon them in both commercial Marne (province of Groningen: about 70 farmsteads) and peasant-like Oosterhesselen (province of Drenthe: about 95 farmsteads) we want to address these and related questions for the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century (see Appendix A and B).

### **The market-oriented coastal region: farmers in Groningen**

Because agricultural production on large farms was the main economic activity in the Groningen and Frisian countryside, the control of land was of supreme importance for the material well-being of individuals and families. Generally, there were three levels of control: 1. The ownership of land; 2. The right to use land for only limited periods; 3. The right to use land nearly eternally for a fixed money-rent (*'beklemming'*) under certain conditions, the tenants being free to dispose of the land anyway they wanted. This last system had developed since the 16<sup>th</sup> century from a peculiar regional institution which originally implied that all the buildings on the land were owned by the user. About 80-90% of the land in Groningen was rented out under this system by urban patricians, nobles, rich farmers and other wealthy countrymen, and by institutions like the church and the provincial government. In the economically difficult first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century with low grain prices the money rents in this system became fixed. This rigidity was consolidated in contracts concluded between the farmers and nearly all the land owners in the period 1760-1790. Only clergymen and schoolmasters usually rented out their land on loose contracts, to secure that a successor still had the free disposal over it.

In practise, nearly all the Groningen farmers became freeholders by 1800. In a few decades the eternal right to use the land or *'beklemming'* had become far more valuable than the ownership rights on the land, due to rising agricultural prices. In comparable regions like the adjoining province of Friesland and eastern Friesland (Germany) the tenants did not own the farm buildings anymore by 1700 and so did not develop strong legal rights on the land. As a result land rents were flexible in Friesland (Knibbe 2006) as in Holland and Zealand, and tenancies of farmers were much less secure.

The rigidity of the land rents made the Groningen farmers extremely rich from 1780 onwards. In the countryside, all the economic power accrued to the farmers. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century they monopolised municipal politics and became the most important cultural force (Botke 2002). The larger farmers and their wives did not work anymore, but until the fifties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were mainly supervising the work of numerous farm labourers and servants. Of course, the families of small and medium-sized farmers had a higher share in the physical work done on the farms.

The security of the *'beklemming'*, meant that leasing out of land for a limited period became of importance from 1800 onwards. For the owner of the eternal right to use the land it was no longer necessary to use the land themselves. This made it easier for rich farmers to acquire vast amounts of land, because it became possible to let out the land on rather loose

terms. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century subletting was usually prohibited by the landowner and quite unusual, concerning only small plots of land.

The importance of land use and ownership was reflected in the social structure. The group of large tenant farmers came directly behind the owners (nobles, a very limited number of actual freeholders and other landowners). Medium-sized farmers, merchants, millers, and more-well-to-do artisans and shopkeepers came next. The bottom of the social structure existed of numerous indigent artisans, tradesmen, cottagers and landless labourers (Paping 2010). A comparable social structure can be found everywhere in the countryside of the Dutch coastal region.

In the eastern Marne in the northern part of Groningen three adjoining parishes were studied: Kloosterburen, Wierhuizen and Leens, comprising 288 houses in 1806, including some 70 farmsteads. In the other houses mostly completely landless labourers, craftsmen, shopkeepers and the like were living. The occupational structure of the three parishes was quite comparable with the whole of the Groningen clay area, where in 1810 about 23% of the adult male population was farmer (including sons of farmers), 39% was labourer or farm hand and 38% was working in industry or services (Paping 1995, p. 68). Presumably, the total number of houses was slightly lower around 1700.

*Table 1. Farms and farm-size in Kloosterburen, Wierhuizen and Leens, 1806.*

	Small 5-15 ha	Medium-sized 15-30 ha	Large 30-50 ha	Very large 50 + ha	Total
1806	31%	27%	29%	13%	70

In the eastern Marne there were about as much small, as medium-ranged as large farms (table 1). Even small farms were large enough to secure enough income for a family, and quite often needed the extra input of hired labour, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The division between several categories of farms did not change much in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The number of very large farms seems to have risen somewhat, which can be attributed to land reclamation. After the flood of 1717 more than hundred hectares ended up outside the dike. A few farms actually disappeared, while others lost land. However, from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century new polders were created by enclosing formerly lost land with new “outside” dikes. Most of the new polders date from the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the number of hectares increased significantly.

*Table 2. Estimates of annual population growth in Kloosterburen, Wierhuizen and Leens (Groningen) and Oosterhesselen (Drenthe), 1750-1900.*

	1750-1800	1800-1850	1850-1900	Population 1795
Kloosterburen e.a.	Ap. 0.3%	1.0%	0.5%	1,226
Oosterhesselen	Ap. 0.4%	1.0%	1.1%	544

From the second half of the seventeenth century onwards the number of inhabitants fell for nearly a century. Population growth resumed again around 1750 (see also table 2), to accelerate at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century until 1880. Because the number of farmsteads was quite stable during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, population growth was accompanied by an enormous increase in the share of labourers, while the share of families mainly active outside agriculture remained quite constant. After 1880, the population of Kloosterburen, Wierhuizen and Leens stagnated for several decades. Population development until 1880 was in line with the rest of the Dutch coastal countryside. After 1880 population growth fell behind seriously, inasmuch as no modern industry emerged, and the region was too far away from the city of



Not surprisingly, the primary goal of farmers in the Dutch coastal area was to sell as much of the produce as possible to the market, to pay for all these obligations. In Groningen mainly mixed farming can be found. Both livestock (cows, sheep, butter, wool) and arable production (oats, barley, wheat, rye and cole-seed) was usually sold to merchants, who were trading it to the city of Groningen and further away to Holland and for instance Great Britain. In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the main emphasis shifted from the sale of meat and butter to grain and cole-seed, although cattle retained its important role as supplier of manure.

Astonishing is the enormous geographical stability of the farmsteads in Groningen, most of them were positioned quite isolated on the land used. The overwhelming majority of the farms continued in existence from the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This continuity was partly made possible by the system of '*beklemming*' already mentioned, which connected a lot of land to specific farm buildings. The law protected the tenant as owner of the farm building and as user of the land (Formsma 1981). The tenant could sell the farm buildings and the right to use the land to a new tenant without much problems. In these cases both were obliged to pay the owner a sum of money which was euphemistically called a present, usually amounting to the rent of a half or one year. This present also had to be paid every six year when the rent was renewed, and also in case the tenant remarried or was succeeded by a heir.

If a tenant was not capable to pay the stipulated rent, the right to use the land returned to the owner who theoretically could split the land into pieces. In practice even at the moment the landowner was free to dispose of the land and the farm buildings, usually nothing changed. Next to the large plots of land attached to the farms there were also some smaller parcels which changed user more easily, especially this was the case for the land owned by the local clergyman.

### **The less commercial inland region: peasants in Drenthe**

The situation in Drenthe was quite different from that in rural Groningen. Agriculture was as important, however, here we do not find a society with large farmers on the one hand and labourers, craftsmen and tradesmen mostly without land on the other hand. In Drenthe nearly all the families were also active in agriculture and used land on their own behalf. Nevertheless, it was not an egalitarian society, although differences were less than in Groningen. Some families controlled only a limited amount of land, and needed additional sources of income, for example from a trade or from wage work. However, all rural families produced a substantial part of their food themselves. In the sandy parts of Drenthe proto-industrial activities were not of much importance, opposite to some other Dutch inland regions. The limited number of artisans, shopkeepers and others active in industry and services were working mainly for the local community, and supplemented their income with agricultural activities.

In this paper we present the parish of Oosterhesselen as an example of a Drenthe rural society. The parish existed of four agricultural communities: the villages Oosterhesselen, Gees and Zwinderen and the hamlet of the Klencke.

Peasants in Drenthe were traditionally divided into four categories. Smallholders needed at least 3 hectares of land to earn a sufficient income (Bieleman 1987). But most of them still had to work on the land of the middle-sized and large farms. The group of middle-sized farms can be divided in two. Peasants with 8 to 13 hectare and sometimes employed one or two adolescent servants. Who owned more than 14 hectares was near to become a large 'farmer', engaging older live-in servants and married labourers. The number of smallholders



was growing slowly in Drenthe during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. Around 1750 this process was still going on in the parish of Oosterhesselen, but it differed strongly from village to village. Most villages had a rather small elite of freeholders with farms of about 14 hectare land or more. Next to this elite there was a slightly greater group of medium-sized farms (including tenants). The group of smallholders (here defined as using 1 to 7 hectares of land), agricultural labourers and craftsmen was in most villages the dominant part of the population. Craftsmen owned in most cases a small farm supplying additional income. Nearly all villages in the province of Drenthe were agricultural communities. Around 1800, 41% of the adult male population consisted of farmers, 38% of smallholders or labourers, and 18% of craftsmen (Karel and Paping 2004).

*Table 3. Farms and farm-size in the parish of Oosterhesselen, 1807.*

	Smallholder 1-7 ha	Medium- sized small 8-13 ha	Medium- sized large 14-18 ha	Large 19+ ha	Total
1807	52%	31%	5%	12%	94

NB: Only cultivated land is taken into account.

The population in Oosterhesselen grew very slowly before 1780, and accelerated somewhat after that year. From 1820 onwards the population of Oosterhesselen increased with a relatively high speed of more than 1% yearly (table 2). In the meantime the number of small farms was increasing and the average farm became smaller. Also the share of smallholders and labourers using only a limited amount of land increased, which happened especially during the 19<sup>th</sup> century period of vast population growth. Presumably also the share of artisans and the like was rising somewhat in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Combining a trade with some agriculture remained the normal income strategy for this group.

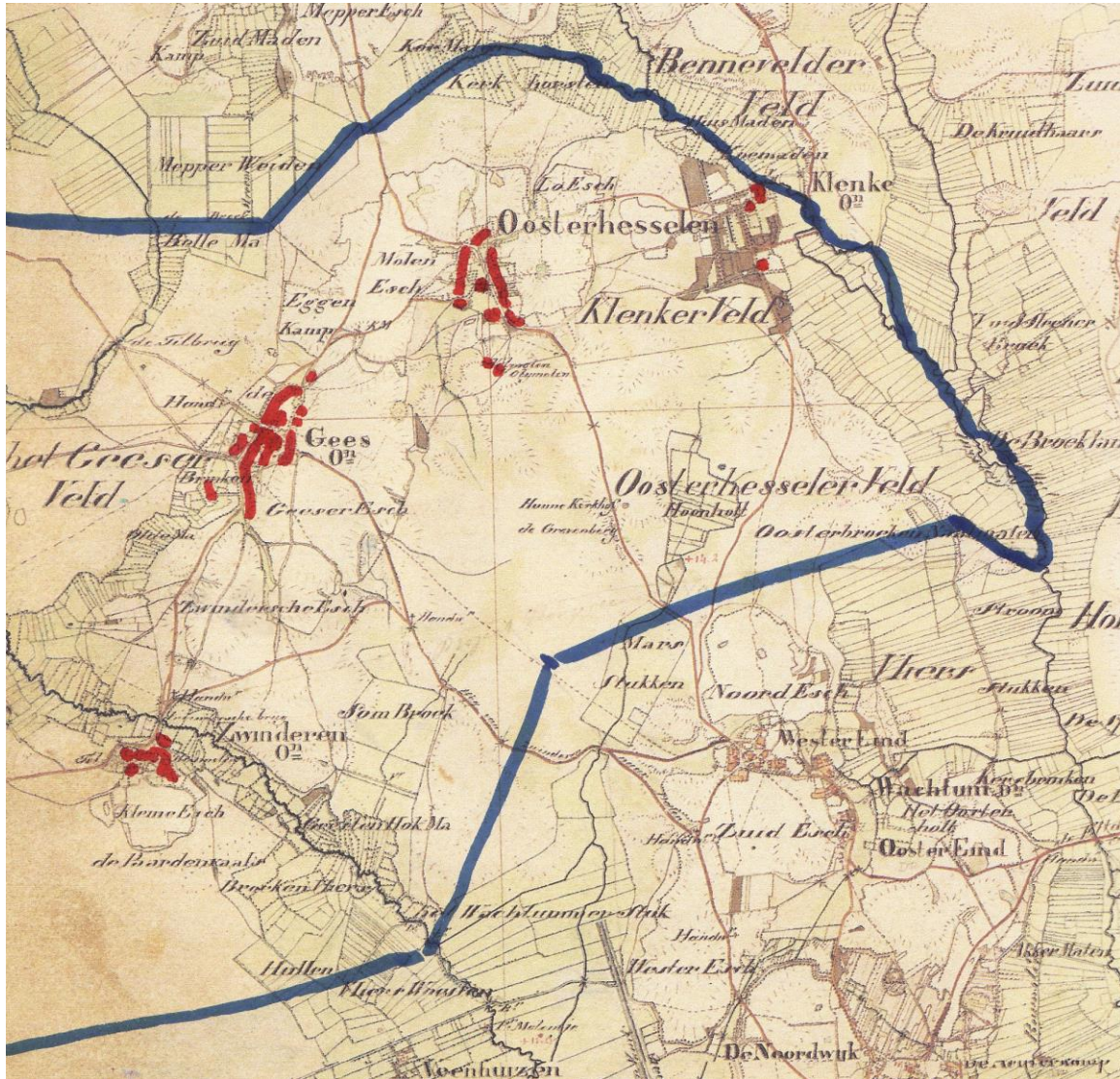
In Drenthe a delicate balance existed between the arable land and the livestock of a farm. The livestock was needed to fertilize the land (dung). A peasant could not use more land than his livestock could fertilize. All the land in Drenthe can be split up in two categories. Arable land and pasture were private property, but the large tracks of heath land and waste land were owned by the community. These commons were used to pasture sheep. The number of sheep a farmer could hold, was determined by his share (*'waardeel'*) in the communal rights. Usually, the larger farmsteads controlled a relative large part of these rights. It was also possible that farmers of the neighbouring agricultural community owned a share in the communal rights. The share of a farmer could be split and sold, but mostly it was kept linked to the farm.

The arable land of a village was situated in one or two nearby areas. It was divided into a large number of small parcels and could only be properly used if the peasants made agreements and rules on the cultivation of the land. Peasants with more land had consequently more influence on the decision-making process. The ownership of the parcels of land could change, but the frequency is unknown. However, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century rules existed on who could obtain the land after the price was set: first family, next neighbours, followed by villagers and finally people from outside the villages. The villages with well-to-do peasants like Oosterhesselen and Zwinderen could keep the land in their 'own hands'. People from outside (except family and others related by marriages) had less chance to obtain properties. In villages like Gees dominated by relatively poor smallholders this situation was different. If prices were too high for the villagers, outsiders were able to acquire farms and land.

A considerable part of the land and farmsteads was owned by the peasants themselves, so actually they can be seen as freeholders. Some of the farmsteads were rented out, partly by nobles and rich countrymen, and partly by freeholders who owned more than one farm.



Unfortunately, we have only detailed information on the ownership of the farmsteads themselves: 44% were owned by the user in 1807, while the others were rented out. Usually the rent was paid in kind, for instance as a specified part of the grain harvest. The only squire of the parish of Oosterhesselen lived in a countryhouse called the Klencke and he let out the four farmsteads in the neighbourhood.



Picture 2. The villages of Oosterhesselen around 1850. In Drenthe, nearly all farmsteads were situated near to each other in villages (red). Vast tracks of common land in the parish (partly situated west of the part shown by the map) were still uncultivated (heath or moor).

The geographic continuity of individual farmsteads in Oosterhesselen (Drenthe) differs considerably from the one in Groningen. The history of some farms can be traced back to the Middle Ages. However, continuously new farmsteads arose in Oosterhesselen in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. Farmsteads usually had been split in parts in the course of centuries of increasing number of farmsteads. On the other hand sometimes small parcels bought could be added to a farmstead. Also small parcels of land could be rented, an agreement usually made orally with two witnesses. Unfortunately little is known about the scale this was done. Clearly hiring and buying, but also selling and letting out of pieces of land caused the size of the peasant farmsteads in Drenthe to fluctuate heavily over time. This contrasted sharply with the Groningen farms which size was often quite stable through the centuries. The connection

between farmstead and land was more loose for the Drenthe peasants than for the Groningen farmers.

The Oosterhesselen farmsteads were all lying near to each other in the villages (picture 2). The land used by the farmsteads consisted mainly of numerous small parcels scattered over the cultivated parts of the village territory. Because of this the size of land cultivated by each farm could indeed easily fluctuate.<sup>2</sup> Also, farms could be split for a while (both the farm building and the land were divided) and later on both parts were joined again. Sometimes a farmstead seemed not to be used as a farm for a certain period but only as a house to live. Some coherent properties consisted of two or even three farms lying very close to each other. These farms were alternately used by the owning family or by tenants. All these elements make it harder to study the continuity of specific farms in Drenthe as such. Due to lack of data it is not always clear who lives exactly where at every moment.<sup>3</sup>

The sandy soil, which demanded the heavy use of fertilisers (manure), made mixed farming necessary for the Drenthe peasants. Specialisation was rare. Only very few farms specialised in raising cattle for farms in Holland. Peasants in the community were depending on each other. Labourers and smallholders using about 1-2 hectare worked on the farms of the medium-sized and large peasants and freeholders during harvest time. Internally, Oosterhesselen was mostly a barter economy. Labour of smallholders was for instance exchanged with peasants with larger holdings for the right to use a horse and cart for a few days. Craftsmen and shopkeepers were often paid by the peasants in kind with agricultural products. Money seemed to have been scarce, however, it was not completely missing in this peasant society. For instance, every sunday, the inhabitants needed coins to put in the collection bag of the local Reformed church. Also when exchanging in kind took place, often the real price of the exchanged products and services was kept in mind.

For a long time it has been supposed that Drenthe had a relatively autarkic economy, characterized by a kind of subsistence farming by peasants (Van Zanden 1985). However, since Bieleman (1987) wrote his thesis on the development of the agricultural system of Drenthe, this vision has been shaded. It is true that the farms in Drenthe were less market-oriented than the farms in the coastal area, but important surpluses were brought to the market and also the price level of grain within the province (and also in Oosterhesselen) was closely related to the price level on the international market. Besides, Drenthe was one of the provinces where cattle was raised for the farms in the coastal area. So the Drenthe peasant economy formed an integral part of the Dutch national economic system.

## **The transfer of farms**

For both the Groningen farmer and Drenthe peasant families the farm was the main source of income. However, while in Drenthe nearly all households exploited some kind of independent agricultural holding, in rural Groningen this was only the case for a minority of the households. So for the young Groningen farmer couples it was much more difficult to obtain a farmstead than it was for young Drenthe peasant couples. For peasants the acquisition of an agricultural holding seemed to have been a quite natural event, which was possibly far less depending on disposable capital and personal qualities than it was for the Groningen farmers. In Drenthe there were only a few alternatives for becoming a peasant. Possibly, the scarcity of money and capital in the peasant society could have made it difficult for young peasant couples to buy farmsteads. Nevertheless, competition between couples for available

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<sup>2</sup> For this reason we are also not always completely certain about the size of the farms

<sup>3</sup> That the family continuity on the farmsteads was quite low (as we will see), did of course also not help in reconstructing the exact occupational history of each farm.

farmsteads was low, at least it is not reported in the sources. So, on first sight the less commercial Drenthe peasantry formed exactly the kind of society where family succession could play a large role in the handing over of farms to the next generation. This also fits in the standard view of Drenthe (also sometimes called 'the Old District'), as a traditional, non-commercial rural society, characterized by an enormous continuity and a very limited geographical mobility of its inhabitants. Inasmuch as the market for agricultural products had only a relatively limited importance, it seems logically that the market for sold and rented farmsteads and land was also less developed in this peasant society.

A closer look, however, makes clear that at least the picture of passing farms over the generations for Drenthe is mainly based on larger farms and on the situation after 1850 (Kooy 1959). It is indeed true that even today we can trace the family possession of some farms back to the Middle Ages (in Oosterhesselen for instance Oldenbanning and Lanting), but it is unclear how representative these examples are. After 1850 a lot of farms were indeed transferred within the family, but was this really also the habit before 1850?

According to customary law in 18<sup>th</sup> century Drenthe one of the sons (mostly the oldest one) should inherit the farmstead with all the land (the immovables) and other sons were compensated in cash or in goods of an equal value. Daughters of peasants received only a share of the movables (Edelman 1974, II, p. 74), which was usually already given to them upon marriage. Sometimes, these regulations were put aside when a testament was made. In 18<sup>th</sup> century Groningen farmers on the other hand nearly always deliberately concluded marriage contracts stating that all sons and daughters should be treated equally in all respects, this in contrast with the old Medieval rule, which gave the sons twice the share of the daughters. Usually the marriage contracts also gave the surviving partner the usufruct of a part of the inheritance of her partner if he or she did not remarry, and they secured that in case there were no surviving children, the heirs of both the bride and groom received a share of the inheritance. From 1811 onwards both Groningen farmers and Drenthe peasants had to divide the inheritance equally between sons and daughters according to the Code Napoleon. In Drenthe this meant of course an enormous legal improvement of the position of the daughters. In Groningen nothing changed, because in previous centuries the population already had chosen for a system of equal inheritances themselves.

*Table 4. Division of transfers of farms in the Eastern Marne (Groningen), 1700-1899 and Oosterhesselen (Drenthe), 1742-1850 (percentages)*

	1700-1799 Groningen	1800-1899 Groningen	1742-1799 Drenthe	1800-1850 Drenthe
Son (married)	12%	20%	22%	20%
Daughter (married)	8%	9%	1%	3%
Unmarried child or children	2%	1%	(not counted)	(not counted)
Other near relatives	4%	5%	9%	6%
<b>Total relatives</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>29%</b>
Widow remarrying	12%	7%	1%	1%
Widower remarrying	11%	7%	(not counted)	(not counted)
<b>Total remarriages</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>(1%)</b>	<b>(1%)</b>
Unrelated new farmers (sold)	43%	34%	n.a.	n.a.
Unrelated farmers (rented out)	1%	7%	n.a.	n.a.
Empty / labourers / disappear.	7%	9%	n.a.	n.a.
<b>Non-family</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>69%</b>
Unknown	1%	0%	5%	0%
N	360	305	281	257

NB: Other near relatives comprise brothers and sisters, but also family members who inherited the farm from childless people. For Groningen, the taking over of unmarried children was only considered to be an independent transfer if the children remained in charge for more than 10 years without selling the farm or handing it over to one of them around his or her marriage date. Sons (married) and daughters (married) include those marrying within 10 years after taking over the farm. If the farm was left empty or if it was inhabited by labourers or other non-farming households for more than five years, this was also considered to be a transfer. For Drenthe it is at the moment still impossible to split the non-family farm transfers.

Table 4 shows that despite the stress which in literature is laid on family succession of peasant farmsteads, the most ordinary way to transfer a farm in Drenthe in the period 1742-1850 was handing it over to strangers. In this respect differences between the Groningen farmers and Drenthe peasants were not large. The frequency of non-family transfers of farmsteads was even significantly higher in peasant Drenthe. Overall, the share of transfers within families (including remarrying widows) in peasant Oosterhesselen was only about 31%, compared to more than 40% for the Groningen farmers. These figures absolutely do not fit into the existing view that farms in Drenthe were mostly passed within the family from generation to generation. Even if it is presumed that the number of transfers to relatives is slightly underestimated (in the 18th century we can not always properly identify a family relation between succeeding users of farmsteads), the picture of passing farms within families is shattered.

Even for Groningen the importance of family succession must be seen as low, certainly if we take into account that thanks to the system of '*beklemming*' the Groningen farmers had a relatively very strong hold on the land. They were not dependent on land owners for the continuation of the use of the farmstead as often was the case in other parts of the coastal Dutch region (for instance Friesland and Holland). So, it can be expected that non-family transfers of farmsteads was of even larger importance there. This last proposition is indeed partly supported by the research of Damsma and Kok (2005) involving 19th century farmers in Akersloot (Holland).

Taking into account that according to Goody (1973) three quarter of the families with surviving children had one or more sons, the share of succeeding sons in both regions was extremely small, ranging from 12% in 18th century Groningen to 22% in 18th century Drenthe. In practise, farmer and peasant couples both seem to have given a very low priority to the succession of sons. However, the chances for sons to succeed were still considerably better than for daughters. In 18th century Groningen the advantage of farmers sons was only relatively limited, however, this advantage increased significantly in the 19th century, mostly due to the improving chances of sons to succeed their parents. Such an increase in chances of sons does not show up in the figures for peasants sons in Drenthe between the second half of the 18th and the first half of the 19th century.

The increasing succession of sons of Groningen farmers seem to have been mostly a phenomenon of the second half of the 19th century, which became even more important in the 20th century (Paping 2011). This rising share of succession of sons in the nineteenth century came mostly at the expense of the falling share of remarrying widows and widowers, an event which diminished rapidly in the second half of the 19th century due to falling mortality. However, the selling of farms to strangers remained a normal strategy in this period. Rich farmers bought extra farms which they let out, or in which they housed labourers temporarily. It was not unusual to transfer these extra farms to one of the children after some time. If we compare the nineteenth century farmers of Eastern Marne with those from Akersloot in Holland (Damsma and Kok 2005), than it seems that although direct family succession was



even of less importance there, in Akersloot parents were far more active in trying to preserve a new farm for their young children. This was especially the case for the large farmers. For the children of small farmers it was usually quite difficult to establish themselves as farmers in Akersloot. This is in accordance with the low share of farm succession for small farmers found in the Eastern Marne. Although Damsma and Kok do not give exact figures for farm succession, they suggest that the normal practise was that a rich farmer secured a farm for his children around marriage age, which made it possible to marry relatively young.

In line with the increasing involvement of parents with the acquisition of farms of their children the renting out of the family farm to marrying children became increasingly popular during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Due to the rising welfare of the farmers, the parents were able to retire after some 30 years and build a house in the village, living from the annual rent. This new retirement strategy made it possible to fit the transfer of the farm to the next generation better into the family lifecycle. This early retirement strategy was very comfortable for the succeeding child, inasmuch as he or she did not have to search for a farm, borrow money or wait until some moment in the future.

Unfortunately, the figures of the Oosterhesselen peasant holdings do not go further than 1850. However, there are reasons to think that a same kind of development as for the Groningen farmers might have taken place in Drenthe, making (male) family succession there also of far greater importance in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Astonishing is the extremely low chances in Drenthe for peasant daughters to succeed, especially in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, the number of succeeding daughters was still nearly negligible in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These results are completely in accordance with customary law in Drenthe before 1811, which did not give the peasant daughters any right on the farmstead. Even the large legal improvement in their position in the division of inheritances in 1811 did only have a marginal effect according to the figures, which suggest that the Drenthe peasants after 1811 tried to adhere to the old customary law.



*Picture 3. Heemsterheerd (large farm in Kloosterburen), the main building is from 1852, the middle house dates from 1667, and the barn from 1877.*

For the parental couple the control of their farm was a prerequisite in life, not only supplying them with income, but also with power. In Groningen, parents clung to their farms and the transfer of farms usually took place post mortem. However, post mortem transfers are not the whole story. Usually, both husband and wife had a legal right on half the property.

After one of them died the surviving parent nearly always kept control of the farm in Groningen. The deceased partner was usually replaced by hired labour (a farm hand or maid). The widower or widow became indebted to the children without paying rent until they became 18 year. After the age of 18 the debt theoretically had to be paid, but in practise this only happened if the surviving parent could free the money.

Children were not inclined to wait with marrying until receiving these sums. Most of the children married when father, mother, or possibly a stepmother or stepfather was still in charge of the parental farm. The Groningen strategy of widows and widowers to stay on the farm and to often search for a new marriage partner after the premature death of their first one, considerably postponed the moment when a new generation could take over. As a result nearly a quarter of the transfers in farms in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was related to remarrying widows or widowers. This share decreased considerably in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, because of the falling mortality of adult males and females.

In Drenthe, on the other hand, the position of at least the widows was not that strong. The loss of the male peasant usually meant that there was not enough labour available in the household anymore to successfully exploit the peasant holding. Before 1811, the peasant widows presumably also had less rights on the farmstead, which was to the greatest extent financed by the male partners (due to the prevailing inheritance system). The widow was often forced to hand the family farm over to a son or to sell it. In a few cases she put a tenant on the farm, but only seldom she remarried. Obviously remarrying peasant widows was not a part of the cultural pattern in Drenthe. Even the improvement of the legal situation of inheriting women after 1811 did not change a lot according to the figures.



*Picture 4. Painted impression of two traditional farms in Drenthe by H. Melgers (1899-1975).*

The inappropriate timing of the death of the parents often hampered the succession of one of the children. Sometimes both parents died too early for children to take over. If one of the children was old enough, their guardians could in theory keep the farmstead for a few years. However, the management of a farmstead without available adult labour was quite complicated, so usually the guardians sold or rented out the farm after a short period. If on the other hand parents lived too long, they did not free the farmstead and succession was only

possible by creating three-generation households (see also later on). The timing problem for the succession of children was also pointed out by Damsma and Kok (2005) for 19<sup>th</sup> century farmers in Akersloot (Holland). Succession of children was less obvious than most of the literature suggests, inasmuch as it often did not fit well into the family lifecycle; parents either died too young, or lived too long.

For the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century we can compare the Dutch results internationally. In Belm in Westfalia (Germany), between 1711 and 1860: 38% of the large and small farms went to male heirs, 13% to female heirs, 36% to remarrying widows and widowers, and only 13% to others (Schlumbohm 1994: 385). These figures for Belm do not take into account the about 60% of households of smallholders and landless people. In Neckarhausen (Germany) most of the plots of land sold went to relatives and not to strangers (Sabeau 1990: 373-415). In their study of two parishes in southern Sweden in the period 1720-1840, Dribe and Lundh (2005) also find only a few non-relatives and a lot of sons and daughters succeeding after the death of a widow or widower. Seen in this respect it is not surprising that most of the international literature on the transfer of farms is mainly preoccupied with the way parents passed the farm over to one of their children (for example: Dribe and Lundh 2002; Alos 2005; Arrizabalaga 2005; Fertig and Fertig 2006; Fauve-Chamoux 2006).

Clearly, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century both farmers in the Eastern Marne and peasants in Oosterhesselen lived in a completely different world. Transferring the farmstead to strangers was a very ordinary event. Possibly, these differences were related to a higher market dependence of both the Groningen farmers and the Drenthe peasants. However, in that case you also would expect a significant difference between the commercial farmers and the less market-oriented peasants. The only clear difference is the very bad position of women in Drenthe. The relative chances of female heirs in Groningen were much better than in Belm with its high importance of family succession. Though on the peasant farms of Drenthe it was the other way around. Even compared to Belm the chances of daughters were minimal, making clear that the very limited succession-rates of the Drenthe daughters was quite exceptional. The only available explanation is the traditionally very weak position of daughters and wives in the division of the inheritance. Daughters had nearly no right on the parental farmstead, and they were very easy to buy out, because until 1811 they did not have any right on the immovables. Widows were probably often seen as unfit to run a farmstead, and had only limited entitlements on the farm.

The next question to be answered is, if the large share of non-family succession is relating to all kind of farmsteads of peasants and farmers. In Groningen small farmers already had relatively pretty large holdings compared to the possessions of the non-farming households. In Drenthe, on the other hand, even the numerous very small farmsteads of quite poor smallholders with more than 1 hectare of cultivated land were taken into account. Possibly, family continuity of holdings was far more difficult to reach for those smallholders living on the edge of subsistence.

## **Differences in farm-size**

Tables 5 and 6 make clear that for both farmers and peasants there were indeed very large differences in farm transmission between farms of different size. In small and middle-sized farms in Drenthe and Groningen family succession played only a lesser role. Selling the farm to strangers was the normal way to dispose of the farm and the (temporary) disappearance of a farm was also a quite ordinary event. However, the larger the farm the more important was family succession instead of selling to strangers. Despite that the numbers are quite small, it is clear that families had a far greater grasp on the very large farms in the long run. Sons were



clearly the preferred successors, with figures nearly comparable with those mentioned for the farms in Belm in Westfalia (Schlumbohm 1994), daughters played a relatively smaller role. The figures seem to suggest that succession and especially male succession was an ideal which was only attainable for the more affluent peasants and farmers. Families controlling larger farms were indeed more able to pass their farm to a family member.

*Table 5. Division of transfer of farms in the Eastern Marne (Groningen), 1700-1899 (percentages).*

	5-15 ha	15-30 ha	30-50 Ha	50+ ha	Total
Son (married)	8%	10%	22%	34%	16%
Daughter (married)	9%	6%	11%	8%	8%
Unmarried child or children	0%	1%	3%	4%	2%
Other near relatives	6%	4%	4%	4%	5%
<b>Total relatives</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>30%</b>
Widow remarrying	13%	8%	9%	13%	10%
Widower remarrying	6%	10%	12%	8%	9%
<b>Total remarriages</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>19%</b>
Unrelated new farmers (sold)	46%	45%	31%	20%	39%
Unrelated farmers (rented out)	1%	5%	4%	3%	4%
Empty / labourers / disappear.	11%	9%	4%	2%	8%
<b>Non-family</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>50%</b>
Unknown (not a son)	1%	1%	-	-	1%
N	160	251	189	76	676

NB: see table 4.

The comparatively high incidence of (male) family succession on large farms suggests that rural families in earlier periods might have wanted to pass their farm to their children, but that they possibly could not afford such a strategy, which as discussed often did not fit well into the family life cycle. The smaller the farm the more pragmatically farmers and peasants had to deal with the control of the farm, depending on the best solution at the specific moment that the farm should be passed to others because of the death or incapability of the last users.

Also it were these smaller farmers and peasants who were more easily confronted with insolvency, an event which nearly always resulted in the transfer of the farmstead to unrelated people. There are many examples of creditors in both Groningen and Drenthe which did not longer wanted to wait for their payments. In a commercial money economy like rural Groningen people could easily fail financially. Bankruptcy was the punishment for wrong economic decisions, inadequate farming and bad luck. If a farmer couple was significantly less capable than other farmers it would nearly inevitably lose its farm. In less commercial Drenthe on the other hand insolvency usually seems to have been more related to demographic disasters in the household (loss of the male partner) or with ageing smallholders who were no longer capable to sustain themselves. Money and the market might have been of less importance in the Drenthe peasant society, however, they were by no means unimportant, because even here part of the obligations had to be paid in money and having small or even large debts was not unusual.

Because of the high selling-rate, small and medium-sized farms could play an important role in so-called 'farm-hopping' strategies of children of richer farmers or peasants, who in the first years after marriage lived on small farms, to move to a large farm holding later on. The acquisition of such a larger farmstead was often connected to the reception of an

inheritance, or a couple in the end got the permission to take over a parental farm. The purchase of a larger farm could also be a sign of upward social mobility of a successful farmer or peasant. A lot of starting couples had to acquire their first farmstead outside their family network. In the parish of Oosterhesselen many peasant couples started their farming career in Gees. In this village smallholder farms dominated and obviously such a farmstead was easier (and for less money) to acquire. However, in Drenthe the solution for the starting problems of new couples could also be that a large farmstead (both the house and the land) was temporarily split and exploited by two nuclear families together. One other reason for such strategies can have been that couples with no or only young children had only a limited amount of labour at their disposal, so they in first instance did not need a large farmstead. This reason for farm-hopping (and farm-division) must have been of more importance for the peasants in Drenthe - where agriculture was mainly based on family labour - than for the farmers in Groningen, where a large part of the agricultural work was done by labourers and live-in servants.

*Table 6. Division of transfer of farms in Oosterhesselen (Drenthe), 1742-1850 (percentages)*

	1-7 ha	8-13 ha	14-18 ha.	19+ ha	Un- known	Total
Sons	15%	28%	27%	31%	10%	21%
Daughters	2%	0%	3%	0%	20%	2%
Other relatives	4%	11%	7%	16%	0%	7%
<b>Total Relatives</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>Widow Remarrying</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Non Family</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>66%</b>
Unknown	3%	4%	0%	0%	0%	3%
N	291	140	30	67	10	538

NB: see table 4.

Interestingly, in Groningen relatively much daughters were able to take over small family farms of 5 to 15 hectares, even slightly more than sons. Sons and daughters seem to have had an equal power position on these farms. Nevertheless, selling remained the most important way to transfer these small farms to a new farmer. The strong preference for male succession is clear for the farms of 15 hectares or more; the larger the farm, the higher the chance of the succession of a son and the lower the chance of the succession of a daughter. For peasant Drenthe the situation was completely different. Daughters did not succeed much both on small and large peasant holdings.

The taking-over by other family members played a remarkably large role on the medium-sized and larger farmsteads in peasant Drenthe. This might be due to the 18<sup>th</sup> century inheritance practice that if a couple had no (living) children the inheritance could be transferred up to the 10<sup>th</sup> degree within the family. However, relatives inheriting from childless couples can not completely explain these high figures. They suggest that peasant families actively searched for solutions to keep farmsteads into the sphere of the broader family. Such general family strategies can not be discerned in the figures of the Groningen farmers, where relatives only played a very limited role in the transfer of farms.

A possible explanation of the still very high share of non-family transfers of medium-sized and large peasant farm holdings in the parish of Oosterhesselen is that more than half the farms were rented out. The mobility of families on these rented farms was relatively high, with unrelated farmer families succeeding each other sometimes every decade. These rented farms were responsible for most of the non-family transfers of large farms. However, some of

these rented farms were kept in the same family for more than a century (Edelman 1974, II, p. 75). Nevertheless, it were the freehold farms which were most often passed on to the next generation. Despite the fact that we can not make a clear division between rented and freehold peasant holdings, the figures in table 6 make clear that even numerous large freehold peasant farms must have been handed over to strangers.

### **Marriage and the acquisition of farmsteads**

From an individual perspective there were four distinct ways to obtain a farm:

1. Succeeding your parents or other relatives;
2. Marrying someone who succeeds his or her parents or relatives;
3. Marrying a widow or widower with a farm;
4. Buying or renting a farm from a stranger.

It has already become clear that for both Groningen farmers and Drenthe peasants the purchase of a farm was at least as important as the taking over of a family farm. In both societies one did not automatically become a farmer or peasant by waiting until the family farmstead came available.

The majority of the future farmers actively had to secure a farmstead by buying or renting one, and so had to accumulate the resources to make this possible. As already mentioned, the potential farmer or peasant couple needed capital for investments in livestock, equipment and stocks, and also usually had to pay for the farmstead and the land. Farmsteads were often too expensive to be paid by alone by accumulated wages as a farm servant, by dowries or even by inheritances.

In 18<sup>th</sup> century Drenthe peasant daughters usually received their (limited) part of the inheritance upon marriage, while sons often had to wait until the death of the parents. In Groningen rich farmers donated their male and female children sometimes a certain amount of capital upon marriage, to be deducted from the inheritance they would receive later on. Others borrowed large sums of money to their children upon marriage. This last strategy also was relatively important in Akersloot in 19<sup>th</sup> century Holland (Damsma and Kok 2005). For both the Groningen farmers and Drenthe peasants the most important way to finance a new farmstead indeed must have been the borrowing of money from family members, but also from established farmers and others. In a sense succeeding heirs in both Drenthe and Groningen had the same financial problems. When there were more surviving children they often had to borrow money to pay their brothers and sisters their legal share of the inheritance.

As a result, credibility was of extreme importance for a couple wishing to obtain a farm, the creditors had to believe that the money borrowed would actually be repaid. The interest rate in the northern Netherlands was low (fluctuating from 3% to 5% in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century), so creditors insisted on nearly 100% security. If a couple was not found credible, it was very hard to borrow the money needed. Money was too important (Groningen) or too scarce (Drenthe) in these societies to do one a favour, even in the case of a family member. Because of this, definitely the most easy way to obtain a farm was marrying a widow or widower. In this case the money to finance the part of the marriage partner could be automatically borrowed from the stepchildren.

Marrying farmer children in Groningen who did not have enough resources to acquire even a small farm were sentenced to a life as craftsmen, tradesmen or even worse as labourers. These positions had definitely a lower status and did not give much chance to obtain a farm later on, due to large income differences in this society (Paping 1995; Paping 2010). At the same time, the very high investments needed for farming had acted as a serious hindrance for non-farmers to establish themselves on a farmstead. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century

Groningen clay area only about 67% of the marrying farmers sons and slightly more than 50% of the marrying farmers daughters was able to become farmer themselves (Paping 2011). These figures are quite comparable with 19<sup>th</sup> century farmer children in Akersloot (Holland) with 62% of the sons and 44% of the daughters becoming farmers (Damsma and Kok 2005). So downward social mobility was very common for the children of commercial farmers. In a sense the chances of peasant children in Drenthe were better. At least it was easy for them to become peasant again after marriage. Those who only had limited resources upon marriage could nearly always secure a smallholder- or rented farmstead, which at least gave them some perspectives on improvement later in life. Even the local craftsmen and others often used some kind of small farmstead.

Only for Groningen we have detailed information on the moment of acquiring a farmstead in relation to the marriage date. If we leave out transfers due to remarrying widows and widowers, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century about half the transfers of farms took place around the marriage date of the new owners. In the other cases the new owners were already married for two years or more, while only 17% was married 10 years or longer. The last group consisted mainly of couples who moved to a larger farm. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century there was not much difference between couples buying a farm or taking it over from their parents or other family members. Only a tiny minority was already in charge of a farm as a bachelor. Succession of parents around the marriage date was in some instances related to the death of the parents, but was also made possible by the selling of the farm by the parents to one of the children. Usually only one of the parents was still alive.

Interestingly, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it became increasingly difficult for those not succeeding their parents to acquire a farm around or before the marriage date. The share of these farm transfers fell from 47% to 34%. For farmer succeeding their parents this share increased slightly from 59% to 64%. Possibly, population pressure and the limited availability of farms made it more difficult for couples to get a non-family farm directly after marriage. In the meantime the overall of farmers becoming the user of a new farm 10 years or more after their marriage date increased from 17% to 23%, which suggest a slightly growing importance of farm-hopping.

In Groningen both in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century about 30% of the farms were acquired between 2 and 9 years after marriage. Only to a limited part these farmers also left a farm behind. Mostly it were newly-wed couples which were not able to secure a farm around the marriage date, in many cases they were not prepared to buy a smaller farm first, and waited for the opportunity to get a larger farm later on. They could follow several different strategies after marriage. 1. They could settle down somewhere in a house, hoping that in a few years there were better opportunities to acquire a farmstead. This strategy had the disadvantage that it was difficult to make a good living. A steady income was not assured, especially not if the couple did not have the capacities to do a trade or craft. 2. They could go and live with the surviving parent, perhaps in the hope that in the end the farm would be transferred to them. This strategy had at least the advantage of supplying a secure livelihood, but there was no guarantee that the young couple indeed was allowed to succeed.

Both strategies were chosen by potential farmers and peasant. The first strategy of settling down as a labourer or tradesman in a house was very dangerous. It was the first step to downward social mobility, and a lot of farmer and peasant children who supposedly considered this a temporary step never acquired a farm at all. Especially from the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards population growth resulted in frequent downward social mobility, inasmuch as the number of farms did not increase in Groningen (Paping and Collenteur 2004). In Drenthe the number of labourers and smallholders was also increasing sharply from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards due to the population growth.

The second strategy of living together with the parents was usually only temporarily acceptable because of the strong preference for neolocality, especially in Groningen. Under the peasants of Oosterhesselen neolocality seems also to have been widespread in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century households with three generations became more common (Kooy 1959). Around 1840 in Oosterhesselen nearly a quarter of all the households was extended, twice as much as on the Groningen farms. For Havelte a different village in Drenthe it is known that in 1829 also 24% of the households had a complex character (Verduin 1972, p. 102). About 45% of the (medium-sized and large) peasant households were of this type, and only 10% of the labouring households. These figures are comparable with 24% and 36% extended households in Belm (Westfalia) in 1772 and 1858, and even 42% and 40% extended households of farmers (Schlumbohm 1994, p. 268-269). Presumably about the same situation existed in Oosterhesselen around 1850.

*Table 7. Household structures of peasants and farmers in the Netherlands 1749-1849.*

	N	% three-generation households	Other extended and multiple households	% total extended and multiple households
Rural Veluwe (Guelderl.) 1749 (whole peasant society)	3.917	4%	3%	7%
Rural Overijssel 1749 (whole peasant society)	7,763	14%	7%	21%
Drenthe sand region 1829-1849 (whole peasant society)	Ap. 2,000	n.a.	n.a.	ca. 24%
Oosterhesselen (Dr.) 1839-1849 (whole peasant society)	317	12%	12%	24%
Groningen clay area 1829-1849 (farmers only)	537	7%	6%	13%

Sources: Slicher van Bath (1957); Roessingh (1965); Verduin (1972); Paping (2008).

The share of extended households in Drenthe around 1850 was relatively high, if we compare it with the figures for other peasant regions in the Netherlands, like rural Overijssel and rural Veluwe around 1750 (table 7). Unfortunately, we do not have the sources to prove that extended households in Drenthe were indeed less frequent in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Possibly, the falling mortality rate had increased the incidence of living together with surviving parents, brothers and sisters. There are reasons to believe that the tendency towards an increasing share of three-generation and other extended households continued after 1850. For this period Kooy measured up to 66% extended families in villages in the eastern part of the Netherlands (Kooy 1959).

If we take into account that extended households are often only a phase in the family lifecycle, the high percentages in Oosterhesselen around 1850 suggest that the extended household were a very ordinary situation on the middle-sized and larger peasant farmsteads. Half the extended households were three-generation households, in the other half usually unmarried brothers and sisters, but also sometimes uncles, aunts, nieces or nephews were living in. At first sight, it seems attractive to impute nearly all these extended families in Oosterhesselen to previous or future family succession of the farm. If a married child succeeds its parents (or wants to succeed them in the future) this can result easily in a three generation household. After the death of the last parent, unmarried brothers and sisters will stay on the family farm which results in a laterally extended household. However, the figures

in table 6 make clear that even for the larger farmsteads family succession happened only in a minority of cases. So the conclusion has to be that a considerable number of the extended households of Drenthe peasants were not at all related to family succession.

Indeed there were other important personal reasons than family succession for the construction of non-nuclear households. These reasons are of importance in both Drenthe and Groningen. First, the presence of three-generation households often was related to the caring for old aged. When they were incapable of taking care for themselves mother or father moved to the farmstead of one of the married children and left the family farmstead behind. Also it happened that one of the children lost its partner, and one of the parents (or adult brothers and sisters) helped to sustain the farmstead. Because of a shortage of labour it could also be attractive, especially for young couples running a larger farmstead, to admit one or more unmarried family members to the household. For these family members this could also be beneficial, while the alternative was often becoming a live-in servant, a position with a low social status and limited freedom.

Another important reason for the existence of many three-generation households was that young married couples only temporarily lived with the parents to solve their short run housing problems after marriage. The goal of the young couple was in that case not to take over the parental farm, but to gain time for acquiring a farmstead (or other position) themselves. Especially, in Groningen these couples often ended up without a farmstead and had to content themselves with a position as a miller, merchant or even in the worst case as a farm labourer. The higher share of extended households in Oosterhesselen than in Groningen suggests that living together with family members was seen as more attractive in the Drenthe peasant society, than in the commercial Groningen farmer society around 1850. In Groningen, living in a nuclear family (so-called neolocality) without interference of any family members restricting social freedom within the household, was given a high priority. Groningen farmers rather preferred to hire unrelated servants than to live with all kind of family members around. Whereas in Drenthe the presence of family members in the household was seen as much more acceptable and even preferable compared to hiring unrelated servants.

Before 1850, in both peasant Drenthe and farmer Groningen, only in a few cases the three-generation household was used as a system to hand the house over to the next generation. Although this was much more common under the larger farmers and peasants, even for them selling the family farm was nearly as good an alternative as handing it over to a son or daughter. However, for Drenthe it seems presumable that after 1850 the three-generation household as a measure to pass a farmstead to the next generation became a more common phenomenon.

The increase in the succession of farmers sons and daughters around their marriage date in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> and especially the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Groningen was a quite expensive strategy. Because of the strong preference for neolocality, early retirement of the parents was necessary. Not only did they lose income, but also the parents had to finance a separate home for a (very) long period. This was what indeed happened in Groningen in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when farm succession of a son around his marriage date was combined with early retirement of the parents became the most usual model. Only the from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century increasing welfare of farmers made this expensive strategy - resulting in the building of numerous villa's for retired farmers - feasible (Paping 2011).

*Table 8 Average age at first marriage of farmers in the Eastern Marne and peasants in Oosterhesselen, 1750-1899 (marriage cohorts).*

MALES		FEMALES	
Marne farmers	O-hesselen peasants	Marne farmers	O-hesselen peasants

	Age	N	Age	N	Age	N	Age	N
1750-1799	28.1	96	31.3	69	24.7	94	25.6	62
1800-1849	27.4	104	31.7	114	24.9	108	27.0	128
1850-1899	29.3	100	-	-	24.9	102	-	-

The difficulty to obtain a farmstead directly after marriage combined with the preference for neolocality, made it often very attractive to postpone marriages for both farmers and peasants. Waiting with marrying presumably improved the chances on a farmstead. Nevertheless, those men and women in charge of a farm in Groningen, though conforming to the Western European marriage pattern, did not marry extremely late in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century (table 8). At a certain age it became quite clear if one had the capacity to become a farmer or not. For the commercial farmers the resources (farming capacity, available capital, credibility to borrow from family or strangers) of a couple necessary to obtain a farmstead did not increase much anymore after a certain age.

The average age at marriage for both males and females, but especially for males, was higher for peasants in Oosterhesselen, suggesting that they indeed were postponing marriage. With an average age at marriage of 31-32 male peasants married extremely late. In Drenthe it was clear that a new couple needed a peasant farmstead. However, the higher the resources, the better the farm one could acquire, taking into account that the chances on the family farmstead were only limited. Presumably these resources still increased for males in their early thirties, thanks to accumulated wages, a rising credibility and a higher chance to obtain at least part of the inheritance. For females these reasons were less, their possible money earnings were lower, their capabilities were presumably of lesser importance for the credibility of the couple, and at least before 1811 they received their share of the parental inheritance already upon marriage. For younger couples it might have been less easy to secure a good farmstead, while they could save less money and had less credibility.

## Concluding remarks

This study on the transfer of the relatively large and capitalistic farms in the eastern Marne (Groningen) and the less commercial peasant holdings in Oosterhesselen (Drenthe) suggests that in both societies family succession was absolutely not the rule in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. Continuity within one family was not an infrequent phenomenon, but in at least as many cases the farms were sold or rented out to strangers, or in some instances disappeared or were inhabited by farm labourers. Nevertheless, the data do suggest that the succession by children was not seen as completely unattractive. However, it was only the richest part of the households, in Groningen the large farmers and in Oosterhesselen the large freeholding peasants, which could afford to adhere to this strategy. And even in these cases selling the farm to strangers happened quite often compared to international standards.

For farmers in Groningen the social costs of family succession were quite high, because often the married children already needed a farmstead when the parents were still alive and able to run the farm themselves. This timing problem combined with a huge preference for living in nuclear family households (neolocality) resulted in young farmer couples needing to acquire farms from strangers. This was possible, because there was a well-developed market for farms and farmsteads in this very market-oriented economy. The existence of such a market reinforced the system of buying and selling of farms to strangers. Inasmuch as the family farm embodied usually most of the family capital, the post mortem transfer of the farm needed to be done carefully. Selling secured a fair price for all descendants of the last farmer. Handing it over to an insolvent family member and lending



him or her the necessary money involved a risk of bankruptcy, which the heirs not always wanted to take. Only the most affluent farmers could afford to retire or to make already settled children return to the family farm. With the rising welfare from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, an increasing number of farmers could afford the early retirement strategy to pass the farm to one of the children.

For the peasants in Drenthe the aversion of living in three-generation and other extended households was considerably less. However, in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the relatively numerous extended households found were mostly not related to previous family succession of farmsteads, but were the result of the need to care for old-aged, the need for extra (family) help on a farmstead or the temporary need of a young couple for a house to live in. Inasmuch as most young peasant couples could not reckon to receive a family farm, they had to acquire one themselves. Drenthe peasants married relatively late. The need to accumulate resources in the form of farming capabilities, credibility for lenders and capital (saved wages and inheritances) possibly stimulated the male peasants to postpone marriage to improve their position on the market for farmsteads. Again the existence of this market itself strengthened the system of easy alienation of farmsteads.

A remarkable difference between the two societies is the position of women. Already in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the commercial Groningen farmers chose for legal equality between sons and daughters. To international standards the chances for daughters to succeed on the family farm were high, although still lower than for sons. However, the Medieval preference for the male lineage remained still very strong under the very large farmers, while such a preference can not be discerned for small farmers. The Drenthe peasants had completely different preferences. The succession of daughters on the family farmstead was in no way seen as attractive, and this succession was an extraordinary event, even after 1811 when the legal inheritance position of daughters was made equal to that of sons.

This weak position of females on the farmstead also returns if we look to widows. In Groningen (as for example also in Belm in Westfalia) a large number of remarrying widows were able to retain the peasant farmstead. However, in Drenthe it was quite unusual for widows to run the family farmstead after the death of the husband, and it was even more unusual to keep the farm after remarrying. The reason for this difference in female position is presumably partly related to a strong attachment to old traditions of the Drenthe peasants, but also to the difficulty for a female to run a peasant farmstead without enough male labour, which could be hired far less easily in Drenthe than in capitalistic Groningen with its well-functioning market for wage labour.

To conclude, in the 18<sup>th</sup> and most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the agriculture in commercial, but also in the less market-oriented parts of the northern Netherlands area was supported by supposedly quite capitalistic family relations. Although it happened frequently, the succession of a child was not the prime goal of the household. In Groningen and Drenthe, for a lot of farmers and peasants the acquisition of a farm was not an automatism, and the retaining of the farm was not at all unproblematic. Not the continuation of the farm within the family, but the assurance of an income and the continuation of the family capital formed the main goal of most of these northern Dutch farmers and peasants. This was the same attitude towards land as in west Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, a coastal region in the south of the Netherlands also characterized by commercial agriculture (Van Cruyningen 2000, p. 309). Land was primarily a means of production, and usually did not have enough symbolic or sentimental meaning to cling to it unconditionally, at least not for the majority of small and middle-sized farmers and peasants.

This was a completely different attitude towards the family farm than can be found for the peasants in inland Eastern Netherlands in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century according to De Haan (1994) or in parts of Germany, where continuity of the lineage seemed to have been of

prime importance. However, our study of farm succession in the traditional peasant society of Oosterhesselen in Eastern Netherlands makes it clear that it is dangerous to use 20<sup>th</sup> century information to derive conclusions on family succession for earlier periods. Although it is perhaps true that after 1850 continuity on family farms was of prime importance (Koiij 1959), but before 1850 it was not. An explanation for this rise in family succession for peasant farmsteads could be that the rapid growth of population in the 19<sup>th</sup> century forced different generations of families to stay on the same farmstead, and made it increasingly difficult to acquire a medium-sized or large farm outside the family.

Our research makes clear that there can be very different models for the transfer of farmsteads in rural society. Our hypothesis was that there were large differences between a society with commercial farming, and a less-commercial peasant society, possibly also connected to the incidence of extended households. For the two cases we studied, some differences were remarkably limited. However, within both rural societies the differences were large between farmsteads of different size. Surprisingly is also that a high share of extended households did not have to be an indication for the importance of family succession. Future research has to pivot on how and to what extent somewhere in second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century the flexible system of transfers of farmsteads in the periode 1750-1850 of the Drenthe peasants changed in a quite rigid family succession system with three generation households on the farmstead, or with the older generations living in tiny houses built against or near the original farmstead. Our research give room for the hypothesis that such a rigid succession system perhaps only relates to the large farmsteads, and not to the numerous smallholder farms which existed in the Eastern Netherlands until about 1970.

## **Appendix A: the database used for the Eastern Marne (Groningen)**

For three parishes in the eastern Marne the history of the users and owners of the land have been constructed using a wide range of available data. Amateur historians published two books with detailed information on these histories, which were more or less complete from 1800 onwards (Zijlma 1966; Beukema 1991). They mostly used information from the cadastre, from transfers registered in notary archives and in personal archives of the farmers themselves. In these books the histories of the 18<sup>th</sup> century more fragmented or completely missing. This gap in information had been filled by extensive research in archives. Archival sources used to fill this gap were for instance various tax registers (1719, 1755, 1806), registers of people responsible for dike maintenance, administrations of the province, churches and nobles, personal archives, juridical archives (tenancy conflicts and bankruptcies), and transfer contracts. For most of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the farm histories are quite complete.

With the help of baptism and marriage registers and a lot of genealogies detailed personal information (births, marriages and deaths) of the farmers has been gathered. Baptism and marriage registers for Kloosterburen start in 1722, and in Leens and Wierhuizen already in 1680. Roman Catholic baptism registration starts in 1727, while Mennonite baptism registers were nearly completely missing. Official death registration for these three parishes only starts around 1800. For the province of Groningen an index of all the baptisms and all the marriages before 1811 was available which proved very helpful. In 1811 the Registration Service starts. For the province of Groningen the information in the death registers (1811-1950) and marriages registers (1811-1922) are available on internet (Genlias). The death and marriage registers contain also a lot of information on the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (indication of birth dates and places).

## Appendix B: the database used for Oosterhesselen (Drenthe)

The data for Oosterhesselen have been collected as part of a large project on the common life in this parish between 1742 and 1860, mostly executed by a group of ageing volunteers, which we want to thank for their efforts in collecting the material. Part of this project was making a reconstruction of all the families that lived in Oosterhesselen. For the period before the Registration Service (1811) this was much more difficult than for the period after that year. The quality of the registration was less, and the use of patronymics as surname was still widespread in Drenthe in this period. Next to this family reconstruction, the history of the farmsteads was reconstructed. For data on owners/users we made use of a considerable number of tax lists, notary archives (after 1800) and a lot of other sources. The determination of the size of the farms was mostly based on an extensive description of farms in 1807. These data could also be related to several tax lists in the period 1742-1804.

The data for Drenthe are not as extensive as for Groningen. For the transfers in the period before 1800 we had only secure tax-data with an interval of 10-years, while records on sales are mostly missing. Probably the number of transfers will have been slightly larger than the data suggest, but there is no reason to presume that this will influence the division between family and non families transfers extensively.

## Appendix C: Absolute figures

*Table C.1. Division of transfers of farms in the Eastern Marne (Groningen), 1700-1899 (absolute numbers).*

/	1700-1799	1800-1899
Son (married)	43	63
Daughter (married)	28	29
Unmarried child or children	8	4
Other near relatives	14	17
<b>Total relatives</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>113</b>
Widow remarrying	44	22
Widower remarrying	40	23
<b>Total remarriages</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>45</b>
Unrelated new farmers (sold)	156	105
Unrelated farmers (rented out)	3	21
Empty / labourers / disappear.	24	27
<b>Non-family</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>153</b>
Unknown (not a son)	5	0
N	365	311

NB: see table 4.

*Table C.2. Division of transfers of farms in Oosterhesselen (Drenthe), 1742-1850 (absolute numbers).*

	1742-1799	1800-1850
Son	61	52
Daughter	2	8
Other near relatives	24	16
<b>Total relatives</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>76</b>

<b>Widow remarrying</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Non-family</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>177</b>
Unknown	14	1
N	281	257

NB: see table 4.

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